

ALSACIAN SKETCHES. —

No. II.

Why are the French so far surpassed by the Germans in the art of railway travelling? They did not start in the race weighted, as the English companies did, who had to spend lavishly in passing, and sometimes fighting bills through Parliament. It is a strange fact, that in the country where centralization is supreme, and which enjoys, in most respects justly, a high reputation for method and order, railway matters are not so well managed as on the other side of the Rhine. Those who have tried to sleep on the hard first-class carriages of the lines between Germany and Paris, have often longed for those delightful spring-cushions which counteract the shaking of the line in the German second-class. The contrast appears strongly on the parallel lines of Alsace and of Baden; and as these lines compete with each other for the traffic between the Lower Rhine and Switzerland, the former must labour under great disadvantages. The Alsatian stations are simply disgraceful. So thought I when I took my place from Colmar to Thann in the valley of St. Amarin. The brand railway which passes Thann ends at Wässerbirg, where it meets the diligence which passes the Vosges to Remiremont. I had engaged to meet at Thann in the first hotel mentioned by Boedeker, a German friend, who has just published an excellent guide to the Black Forest. The hotel in question was the Lion, but as the Lion had not only ceased to drive a roaring trade, but to exist altogether, we found ourselves lodged by adverse fate in two separate but contiguous hotels.



Thann

Thann is a town of more than 4000 inhabitants, chiefly engaged in manufactures, situated at the narrow entrance of the valley of St. Amarin. Its old walls formed an oblong, and some of the towers still remain, with many quaint old houses, which are however begrimed by modern smoke. The little cathedral church of St. Theobald is a gem of Gothic architecture, said to have been built by Erwin of Steinbach. Its tower, which is 250 feet high, resembles that of Freiburg in Baden, in having a steeple of open carved stonework or "clocher au jour," and in the octagonal design of the middle tower. It was completed in 1516. But the especial glory of the church consists in its two elaborately carved portals, the details of which would fill a volume. In this building the ogive arch, with rich ornamentation, telling of a date which verged on the decline of architecture, is here in great perfection. To view the town and church to advantage it is well to mount the Engelburg, a vine-clad eminence on the right hand of the entrance to the valley. The Engelburg is crowned by a ruined castle, which was blown up by Turenne in 1674. This castle possesses one feature which especially fixes it in the memory, and which I never recollect to have seen anywhere else, that is, a huge wheel of stones and mortar pierced by a comparatively small opening in the middle. This was the result of the destruction of the donjon, whose tower fell on its side with the

explosion, while the immense thickness of the wall and solidity of the masonry prevented a large portion of it from falling to pieces. From the side of a mountain on the other side of the town there is also, towards sunset, an exquisite view. The cathedral is framed out by converging hills from prosaic associations, and stands against a background of vineyards, the rich colour of its sandstone increased by the evening beams. A fine stream passes through the town of Thann, which in ancient times must have swarmed with trout, and even produces a few still. It has been however made to supply a canal, and degraded and polluted to serve the purposes of the factories. At Thann we heard that a Scotch gentleman had just passed the town in a canoe which he had carried over the Vosges into the Moselle. He was bringing to its conclusion a long and eccentric voyage through inland waters, in the course of which he had navigated some lakes in the Black Forest which had never been disturbed by a boat before, and astonished the natives of the Upper Danube below Dananeschingen. Foreigners, however enlightened, are far too apt to attribute to a bee in the bonnet, the love of such adventures, which are only the result of the high spirits and strong individualism of the people of our islands.

Although the railway is continued up the valley from Thann to Wässerbirg, we were advised to walk thither in order better to observe the very beautifully formed hills on each side. As the primary nucleus of elevation of the Vosges corresponds to that of the Black Forest, so do the newer formations on the outskirts of it. On the side of the southern Vosges, at all events, these formations appear to be more abundantly represented, and some of the finest hills and knolls are formed by them, greatly surpassing in picturesque variety of form the somewhat monotonous gneiss. Porphyritic eruptions also, which produce rocks of remarkably bold and fantastic form, are more common on the flanks of the French mountain-chain. I saw at Thann some very fine specimens of fossil plants in possession of a boy, who could give no exact information about them; they appeared to have been dug out of a sandstone bed, black with contained iron. The fine highroad leading from Thann is flanked by the villas of manufacturers,

some of them laid out in a style of luxurious elegance. The villages of Bitschweiter, Willer and Moosch, are passed in succession. At the second and third of these villages there are two exquisite modern churches built by the same architect, M. Langenstein of Zernetz; whose name is also associated with the church of Herseren, now Wässerberg, which is however somewhat inferior. The church of Willer is conspicuous at a considerable distance. It is a splendid illustration of Mr. Ruskin's Lamp of Sacrifice, and in every respect would gladden the heart of that great connoisseur. The arches of the interior, built of beautiful pinkish stone, branch into the roof like the trees of a forest-arcade. The organ rests on a huge bracket on the right side of the nave. The capitals of the pillars are magnificent specimens of naturalistic stone carving applied to foliage; not one exactly resembles the other, and every one is remarkable for originality of conception. The pulpit is so beautiful that it must take the eyes of the congregation off the preacher. The coloured statuettes of holy persons, saints and martyrs, are all finely executed. The open seats are tastefully framed of oak with ironwork finials.

There are three windows of coloured glass in the apse: one of green and crimson panes, the other of blue and rose, the centre of many colours, with a good medallion of the face of the Madonna. The exterior of the church is unpretentiously neat, and the roof is covered with coloured tiles; the tower, though original, harmonises in its octagonal centre with that of Thann, which no doubt suggested it. The church of Moosch is also a beautiful specimen of modern design, though less costly. Here the organ, which is larger, occupies its usual place at the west end of the nave.

In St. Amarin's Church, which is arrived at soon after, and which is a favourite resort of pilgrims, the pictures by modern artists are the chief attraction. They are all very good. The building itself is subordinate in interest, being of the plain Byzantine style. From the village of Willer the Ballon d'Alsace, the highest of the Vosges, may be readily ascended.

It is said to command a fine Alpine view; but as the haze resulting from the long drought rendered every distant prospect hopeless, we judged that the trouble of the ascent would not be repaid.

At Wässerburg, a village on an eminence in a panorama of mountains, those to the left having particularly bold and rugged outlines, there is an excellent inn in the German style, where the residents of the neighbouring towns love to take up their summer quarters. It rejoices in a very good tap of beer of Lutterbach, a fine clear bitter ale such as Munich, or Burton, could not surpass, and equal to the finest of Allsopp or Bass's beverages. It would almost induce a German traveller to make Wässerburg the limit of his tour, without tempting the unknown wilds beyond. The diligence road to Remiremont here goes up zig-zags to the left, while the valley, becoming wilder and narrower, continues to the right.

At Wässerburg there is an immense manufactory belonging to a wealthy company of cotton-spinners, who, masters and men together, constitute the population. Attached to the manufactory is a sort of park tastefully laid out. It is curious to see at meal-time troops of women and children coming in from a distance laden with the dinners of their husbands and fathers. In this valley of St. Amarin the peasant element seems very subordinate to the manufacturing, and the hills seem depopulated to swell the centres of industry. The consequence is, that there is no beauty of costume to be seen, and that the upper parts of the hills are uninhabited, only an occasional chalet being observable. A cabriolet hired at Wässerburg conducts us to Wildenstein.

By the side of the road stands a grand solitary hill almost inaccessible, seeming to block the gorge called the Schlossberg, crowned by a ruined castle, the original Wildenstein. Wildenstein, the village which Boedeker describes as "a clean place," is nevertheless smutty with industrialism, there being a great glass factory there which produces immense piles of dusky green bulging bottles or carboys.

The little inn seemed to be good. We found a number of guests there

dicussing trout by the help of a good-looking sauce made of red wine; but we returned ourselves to an excellent dinner at Wässerberg, and thoroughly appreciated the wine of Rangen which grow near Thann, and which fortified us admirably for setting forth on our railway journey to Mulhouse and Basel. We only stopped long enough at Wildenstein to visit a waterfall, which we found — not at home. It is called the "Heidenbad," and is formed by the Thur which springs from the Grand Pentron; but the Thur had been reduced by the extraordinary season to a succession of pools, which barely trickled into each other. In the dusk of the evening, rendered still murkier by the smoky chimneys of Mulhouse, whose aspect is worthy of that of a town in the Black Country of England. We paid a visit to the splendid Protestant church which is in progress of building, and which proves that the manufacturers of Mulhouse are not entirely utilitarian in their luxury, and know how to spend their hard-gotten gains with public-spirited munificence. It will be quite equal, when finished, to the mediaeval cathedrals of France, both in size and exuberance of decoration, and the francs that it has cost and will cost must be reckoned by many millions.

From Basel we passed up the valley of the Wiese, partly by railroad, to the neat little town of Schönau at the convergence of two romantic glens, and thence on foot over the Rinken or "col" of the Belchen mountain to Stanfen and the Krozingen station of the Baden railroad. But this part of our trip belongs, strictly speaking, to "Days in the Black Forest."

G. C. Swaywe.

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